

Title: Teacher Education in Mexico: Political Transformation and the Continuity and Discontinuity of Educational Reform.

Overview (50 words)

Teacher education in Mexico has been repeatedly reshaped by shifting political regimes, producing unstable systems of teacher preparation, recruitment, evaluation, and professional development across decades of reform.

This study examines the changing nature of educational reform and teacher education amid political transitions.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between political transitions and the trajectory of education reforms in Mexico, with a particular focus on teacher education. In a political system where presidents serve a single six-year term with no reelection, Mexico has experienced repeated political alternation. Each administration has introduced reforms that reflect its own priorities regarding accountability, professionalization, labor relations, and the role of the state in regulating teacher careers.

This presentation concentrates on the administrations of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018), Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018–2024), and Claudia Sheinbaum (from 2024), Mexico's first women president. It examines how these governments have reshaped the institutional configuration and policy direction of teacher education, including teacher preparation, recruitment, evaluation, and professional development. By tracing both continuity and discontinuity across successive reforms, the study seeks to clarify how political change has generated institutional instability while also producing new forms of regulation and discourse around teacher professionalism.

Methods

The study employs a qualitative analytical approach based on a documentary and literature review. Primary sources include major education reform laws, constitutional amendments, official policy documents, presidential initiatives, and regulatory frameworks issued under the three administrations. These materials are examined to identify the stated objectives, ideological foundations, and policy logics underpinning reforms in teacher education. Secondary sources consist of academic articles, historical analyses, and comparative studies on Mexican education policy and teacher careers. Through a comparative analysis across administrations, the study maps changes in teacher training curricula, certification processes, evaluation systems, recruitment mechanisms, and the institutional architecture of bodies such as the National System for the Career of Teachers, USICAMM (Unidad del Sistema para la Carrera de las Maestras y los Maestros). This approach provides a systematic understanding of how political priorities and stakeholder relations have influenced the design and implementation of teacher education reforms.

Results/Discussion

The analysis shows that education reforms in Mexico have fluctuated sharply with political transitions. In Mexico, improving the quality of education has been a longstanding issue, as evidenced by results from the PISA survey (OECD). One factor contributing to this challenge is the issue of teacher quality. Teacher education has long been shaped by political contexts and by the social roles the state expected teachers to fulfill. Since the 19th century, Enlightenment ideas influenced national integration efforts, and by the mid-20th century education became a tool for state-led economic development. From the 1980s onward, globalization linked education to productivity and competitiveness, incorporating teachers into market-oriented frameworks and strengthening meritocracy and evaluation systems. In the 2000s, the end of more than 70 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party led to the election of the center-left president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, which criticized neoliberalism and introduced the new national education curriculum, “Nueva Escuela Mexicana” (New Mexican School), a curriculum emphasizing community-centered education, diversity, rights, and social justice. Traditional subject-based curricula were replaced by broader learning areas, positioning teachers as central actors working with local communities. President Sheinbaum has continued this orientation.

These repeated reforms have produced constant revisions to institutions and laws, requiring major changes to teacher training frameworks. Standardized teacher evaluation systems were repeatedly introduced and dismantled, creating uncertainty and resistance. Recruitment policies alternated between merit-based exams and systems influenced by seniority or political negotiation, weakening stable career pathways. Professional development also suffered, as continuous and coherent training programs became difficult to maintain. This instability has hindered long-term improvements and the consolidation of consistent professional standards. Even today, USICAMM faces strong criticism from teachers’ unions, and its revision or abolition is under discussion.

Although long-term goals—improving educational quality, strengthening professionalism, and enhancing accountability—have remained relatively constant, the strategies to achieve them have varied widely. Some administrations emphasized standardized evaluations and performance-based recruitment, while others rejected these approaches and prioritized restoring labor rights and separating evaluation from employment. Consequently, the nature of teacher education has shifted significantly with each political transition. This study highlights the strong influence of Mexico’s political context on the formation of education policy, an influence that is particularly pronounced in this national setting.